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A
SERMON

Preached before the

Incorporated SOCIETY

FOR THE
PROPAGATION of the GOSPEL
in Foreign Parts;

AT THEIR
ANNIVERSARY MEETING
IN THE
Parish Church of St. Mary-le-Bow,

On Friday the 17th of February, 1715.

By **THOMAS SHERLOCK**, D.D.
Dean of *Chichester*. *K*

L O N D O N,

Printed by J. Downing, in Bartholomew-Close, for J. Pemberton, at the Golden-Buck, overagainst St. Dunstan's Church in Fleet-Street, 1716.

February 17. 1715.

*At the Anniversary Meeting of the
Society.*

ORder'd that the Thanks of
the Society be given to the
Reverend the Dean of *Chichester*,
for his Sermon preached this
Day before the Society ; and
that he be desired to Print the
same.

D. HUMPHREYS, *Secretary.*



St. MATTHEW iv. Ver. 17.

*From that Time Jesus began to preach,
and to say, Repent, for the King-
dom of Heaven is at hand.*

THE Design of this Meeting being to promote the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts ; and the Success of this Work depending on such Methods as Humane Prudence can suggest, now left destitute of those miraculous Assistances, which the Church of Christ in her Infancy enjoyed ; The Occasion will naturally suggest to your Thoughts, the Consideration of the Encouragements and Difficulties which

attend this Undertaking ; and of the Methods proper to attain this End, so much to be desired by every good and pious Christian: But yet, since I succeed much abler Men, who have gone before me in the Performance of this Duty, and have with great Judgment considered these necessary Points ; since also I stand at present before so many much abler, whose Thoughts have long dwelt upon this important Subject ; I beg leave to decline the unequal Task, and to spend the Time allotted me in considering upon what Foot the Gospel first set out in the World, when it was published by our Blessed Saviour and his Apostles ; and what it had to recommend it to the Reason of Mankind, abstracted from those Signs and Wonders, which were wrought by the Hand of God for its Confirmation.

The Holy Evangelist tells us, that the first Doctrine which our Blessed Lord taught, was that of Repentance ; *From that Time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent : that he taught it as necessary to qualify Men for the Kingdom of Heaven ; Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand.* What is to be understood by the *Kingdom of Heaven's being at Hand*, may be learnt from the parallel Place in St. Mark, Chap. i. Ver. 14, 15. *Now after*

after that John was put in Prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, the Time is fulfilled; and the Kingdom of God is at Hand: Repent ye, and believe the Gospel. Now whatever we understand by the Kingdom of Heaven, 'tis plain that the Reason why it was said to be at Hand, was because the Time was fulfilled, for the publishing the Gospel to all the World; and that the Exhortation in St. Matthew, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand; is the same with that recorded in St. Mark, Repent ye, and believe the Gospel. From whence 'tis evident, that Repentance was inculcated, as necessary to prepare us for receiving the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

The same appears likewise, from the preaching of John the Baptist, who taught the same Doctrine, and in the same Words with our Blessed Saviour: he was that Voice crying in the Wilderness, Prepare ye the Way of the Lord, make his Paths straight: as it was his proper Office to prepare the World for the Reception of the great Prophet, who was to come after him, we may certainly conclude from his Preaching, what was the necessary Preparation required; and as his Doctrine was confined to the single Point of Repentance, this

this was undoubtedly the necessary Qualification for all who were to receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

As our Saviour, and his Forerunner the Baptist, taught Repentance as the first necessary Step to the Gospel: so also did the Apostles. When the Twelve were sent out by our Blessed Lord in the vi. of St Mark, the Evangelist tells us in the 12 Verse, that *they went out and preached, that Men should repent*: St. Peter, in his first Sermon recorded in the ii. of the *Acts*, exhorts his Countrymen to *repent, and be baptized, for the Remission of Sins*, Verse 38: And in the xxth of the *Acts*, St. Paul tells us how he had spent his Time, *testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, Repentance towards God, and Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*, Verse 21st; which were the very Topicks insisted on by our Lord, when he called upon Men to repent, and to believe the Gospel: The same Account he gives of his Preaching to King Agrippa, *Acts xxvi. 20.* Namely, that he had shewed both to Jew and Gentile, that they should repent, and turn to God, and do Works meet for Repentance. In the xith of the *Acts* 'tis said, that the Apostles and Brethren in Judea, heard that the Gentiles also had received the Word of God. St. Peter was called
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upon to render an Account of his Conduct, in communicating the Privileges of the Gospel to the Gentiles; when he had vindicated himself to their Satisfaction, they thus express themselves, *then hath God also to the Gentiles granted Repentance unto Life*: Now it is evident, that what God granted to the Gentiles, was the same that the Gentiles received, and therefore *Repentance unto Life* was the *Word of God*, published to the World by our Lord and his Apostles: and for this Reason, the Writer to the *Hebrews* reckons Repentance from dead Works, and Faith towards God, to be the first Principles, or main Foundation of the Doctrine of Christ. *Heb. vi. 1.*

Before I proceed to lay before you the Consequences, which arise from this State of the Case, I beg leave to make an Observation or two, in Order to clear the Way for what is to follow: You may observe then, that Repentance was the very first Thing insisted on, wherever the Gospel was published, before any new Law or Doctrine was promulged, or so much as mentioned. The Proof of this I need not attempt, since the Passages already produced do plainly contain it, and indeed the Nature of the Thing speaks it; for the Repentance taught, could not respect
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any new Law to be delivered to the World, against which no Offence having been committed, no Repentance could be required.

2dly, That the Gospel was ushered in by the Doctrine of Repentance, not only when it was delivered to the Jew, but also when it was proclaimed to the Gentile World: The Jews lived under a Divine Law, delivered by Moses, and were guilty of many Offences committed against that Law, to which they owed Obedience; But the Gentiles were not under that Law, nor had they been ever called to the Obedience of it; and therefore the Repentance which was taught, as the Introduction of the Gospel, did not regard any particular Institution, but that general Law of Nature, to which every Man owed Obedience, in Virtue of the Reason and Understanding, with which God had endowed him.

3dly, That true Repentance requires a Change of Mind, and leads to a Reformation of Manners, and a due Obedience for the future to that Law of Righteousness, against which the Offence was committed: for where the Obligation of Obedience to any Law ceases, there can be no Call to Repentance for Disobedience: This Doctrine is so plain
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in Scripture, and so uniformly taught by all the Ministers of our Church, that I would willingly suppose no one ignorant of it. The Baptist sufficiently explain'd himself, exhorting such as came to his Baptism, to *bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance*: to which general Instruction his particular Admonitions always correspond. To the hard-hearted and uncharitable Jews he said, *He that hath two Coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath Meat, let him do likewise*: To the Publicans, whose Crime was Extortion, he said, *Exact no more than that which is appointed you*: To the Soldiers, who were noted of Rapine, false Information, and the like Vices, he said: *Do Violence to no Man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your Wages*. In like manner, our Blessed Saviour, when he dismiss'd the Woman taken in Adultery, he let her depart with this Advice, *Go, and sin no more*: so did he instruct also, the Man whom he had set free from the Infirmity, which was the Punishment of his Iniquity; *Behold thou art made whole, sin no more, lest a worse Thing come unto thee*: teaching neither the one nor the other any new Doctrine with respect to their particular Cases, but referring both back to

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that Law which they had transgressed, as the proper Measure of their future Obedience.

I shall now proceed to lay before you such Consequences as seem to me to be the natural Result of this Method made use of by our Blessed Lord and his Apostles, in publishing the Gospel to Mankind:

And the first is this: That the Religion of the Gospel is the true original Religion of Reason and Nature.

This appears by considering the Nature of that Repentance which our Lord, and those who came after him in the Ministry of the Gospel, preached to the World: Repentance supposes a Transgression, and Transgression supposes a Law; for as the Apostle argues, *where there is no Law, there is no Transgression*: and since Repentance consists in a Change of Mind, in rectifying what was before amiss, and in fulfilling that Obedience which was before wanting; 'Tis evident, that to repent of the Violation of any Law, is to return to the Obedience of it: and he that exhorts and calls you to Repentance, calls you back to the Obedience of that Law, against which you had offended. The Question then is, against what Law those Offences were committed, the Repentance for which was so necessary,

cessary, that without it there was no Admittance into the Fellowship of the Gospel of Christ: The Laws of the Gospel, considered as such, are evidently excluded upon the present View; for Repentance being the first thing every where taught, and antecedently to the Publication of any of the Rules and Precepts of the Gospel, the Law not yet published could not be the Rule of that Repentance, which related to Sins already committed. At the Time of the Publication of the Gospel, there were many Forms and Institutions of Religion subsisting in the World; but as these were very different from one another, insomuch that if some were true, others were certainly false; so they could not be the Ground of that Repentance, which being generally taught to all the World, to the *Gentile* as well as the *Jew*, must respect some general Law, which related alike to all, and the Obligations to which were in some Degree universally felt and acknowledged: and this can be no other than that which the Apostle to the *Romans* has described in the ii. Chap. 14 and 15 Ver. *when the Gentiles which have not the Law, do by Nature the Things contained in the Law, these having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves: which shew the Work of the Law written*

in their Hearts, their Conscience also bearing Witness, and their Thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another. However the Light of Reason and Nature was darkned and obscured by the Ignorance and Superstition of the World, yet some Remains of it were in all Places to be found; and the general Principles of Religion were so rivitted in humane Nature, that she could not but start at any Thing that directly contradicted them: Thus, for Instance, in the great Branch of natural Religion, which relates to the Worship and Service of God, tho' Mankind had universally erred and defiled themselves with many Pollutions and Abominations, yet Atheism was as detested a Crime in the Heathen World, as it is in the Christian: and some, we know, were thought worthy of Death, for being the Maintainers of so unnatural an Opinion. A Sense of the moral Duties between Man and Man was better preserved; and there are not many Vices condemned in the Gospel, which were not infamous before in all the civiliz'd Parts of the World. This general Law, as the Apostle tells us, was the Ground-work of Conscience, the Testimony of the Conscience plainly shewing the Work of the Law to be written in the Heart; and this is a
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further Evidence, that this Law of Nature was the Foundation of that Repentance, which was to usher in the Gospel; for as the Preacher of Repentance necessarily refers himself to the Consciences of Men, to point out to them the Guilt of their Actions; so must his Doctrine necessarily relate to that Law, which is the Principle or Origin of Conscience: since then the Doctrine of Repentance, with which the Gospel set out in the World, had Reference to the Law of Reason and Nature, against which Men had every where offended; and since Repentance infers the Necessity of a future Reformation, and a Return to that Duty and Obedience from which by Transgression we are fallen; the Consequence is manifestly this, that the Gospel was a Republication of the Law of Nature, and its Precepts declarative of that original Religion, which was as old as the Creation.

That this must certainly be the Case, will appear, by considering the Nature of the Thing in it self. The Notions of Good and Evil are eternally and unalterably the same, which Notions are the Rules and Measures of all Moral Actions, and are consequently necessary and constituent Parts of Religion: and therefore if the Religion of Nature, in her pri-

primitive State, was pure and uncorrupt, (which will not, I presume, be denied) tho' there was sufficient Reason for a Republication of it, because of the great Ignorance and Superstition which had grown upon the World, yet there could be no Reason for any Alteration of it; for though the World was the worse for abasing the Religion of Nature, and might want to be reformed by a divine Instructor, yet the Religion of Nature was not the worse for being abused, but still retain'd its first Purity and Simplicity. The Duties of Religion, considered as a Rule of Action, flow from the Relation we bear to God, and to one another; and Religion must ever be the same, as long as these Relations continue unaltered: If our first Parent was the Creature of God, so are we; and whatever Service and Duty he owed, in Virtue of this Dependence, the same is due from us; nor can this Relation be ever made the Ground of different Duties in his Case, and in ours; If therefore Nature rightly instructed him at first how to serve his Maker, our Obligations being the same with his, our Rule must be the same also. The Case is the same with Respect to the Duties owing from Man to Man: and it would be as reasonable to suppose, that the
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three Angles of a Triangle should be equal to two right ones in one Age, and unequal in another, as to suppose that the Duties of Religion should differ in one Age from what they were in another, the Habitudes and Relations from which they flow continuing always the same.

That the Case is in Fact what I have represented it to be, might be shewn from the particular Laws of the Gospel, and their Dependence, from the Maxims and Principles of natural Religion: But this would be rather the Work of a Volume, than a Sermon: I will content my self therefore with one general Proof, which reaches to every Part of the Christian Doctrine, and yet will not lead me beyond the Bounds to which I am confined. Our Saviour, in the 5th of St. Matthew, tells us, *that he came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them*: what his meaning was, he sufficiently explain'd in the following Part of his Sermon on the Mount; in which, laying down first the old Law, he shewed in every Instance wherein the true Perfection of that Vertue consisted which the Law required. The Law forbid Murder and Adultery, our Lord declares, that not only the immoral Actions, known by those Names, were

were restrain'd, but even the internal Corruptions of Heart from which they flowed ; and extends the Prohibition to Hatred and to Lust, one the Parent of Murder, the other of Adultery. Since then our Lord so fully declares that his Purpose was to perfect and compleat the Law and the Prophets, it remains to be considered, what Notion he had of the Law and of the Prophets ; In the xxii. of St. Matthew, the Question was put to him by a Lawyer: *Which is the great Commandment in the Law?* Our Saviour answers, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, &c. This is the first and great Commandment:* and the Second is like unto it, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self.* Having laid down these two great Rules, he thus declares his Sense with respect to the Subject of our present Enquiry, *on these Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.* If the Law and the Prophets hang on these two Commandments, then the Doctrine of our Saviour, which is the Perfection of the Law and the Prophets, must hang on them likewise: Now if you will allow that the Love of God, and the Love of your Neighbour, are Fundamentals in the Law of Reason and Nature, (as undoubtedly they are) you must also allow, that

that whatever may be deduced from them, by rational Consequence, must be a Precept of the Law of Nature: whatever therefore hangs on these two Commandments, must necessarily be a Part of natural Religion; and that all the Law and the Prophets do so hang, and consequently the Doctrine of the Gospel, which is the Perfection of them, you have had our Saviour's express Testimony. Since then it appears (as I think) that the Religion of the Gospel is the true original Religion of Reason and Nature;

The Second Thing I shall observe to you is, that it has, as such, a Claim to be received independent of those Miracles which were wrought for its Confirmation.

This Consequence will be admitted by all, who allow the Force and Obligation of natural Religion, and can be denied by none, who know or understand themselves. The Principles of Religion are interwoven in the very Frame and Make of our Minds; and we may as well run from our selves, as from the Sense of the Obligations we are under. If the Law which is in our Members should get the better of the Law of our Minds, and lead us into the forbidden Paths of Vice and Immorality; tho' Obedience cannot hold us,
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yet Guilt will never forsake us; and our own Consciences will not permit us to forget the Law, however our corrupt Passions may induce us to transgress it. This Sense will always keep a Passage open to the Heart, for Instruction to enter in; and there needs nothing more to shew, that Man is obliged to submit to the Rules and Laws of Reason, than to shew that he is a rational Creature; since if Reason be of any Use, 'tis for our Direction; and to suppose a Creature to have Reason to direct him, and yet that he ought not to be directed by it, is a Contradiction: so far therefore as the Gospel represents to us the Law of Nature, it needs only to appeal to the Reason of Mankind for its Authority, and may leave its Cause to be tryed in every Man's own Breast before the Tribunal of Conscience: And how far this is the Case of the Gospel, has been already shewn at large.

But some one perhaps may have a Mind to ask, why he may not teach the Heathen the Religion of the Gospel, as well in his own Name, as in the Name of Christ; since being the very Religion of Reason, it wants no Name to support it? To which I answer: That if the Heathen are such Masters of Reason,

son, as to want no teaching, the Question is impertinent; and if they do want instructing, there is no Comparison between the Masters.

But the Truth is, that all the Essentials of true Religion are contained in that Part of the Gospel, of which so much has been already spoken: But how this Religion came to stand in need of being renewed by a special Commission from Heaven, how Nature came to want that new Light which the Gospel has given, and those additional Helps and Assistances, from the Influence of the Spirit of God, which the Gospel has promised, is a Matter of another Consideration, and opens to us a new View, to see the Reasonableness and Necessity of the Doctrines peculiar to Christianity, which tho' not different, are yet distinct from the Principles of Reason and Nature.

Had Man continued in the Purity of his first Religion, he had wanted no second; the Doctrine of Nature had led him to the Enjoyment of the glorious Hopes, to which he was born, of Life and Immortality. But when he fell under the Power and Dominion of Sin, he grew both blind and impotent, had but little Knowledge left to find his

Duty, and still less Ability to perform it. The History of the Fall is preserved to us in sacred Writ, but let the Scripture be silent, and let Experience only speak. Look back into the past Ages of the World, as far as the Clue of History can guide you, and tell me in what Place the Purity of natural Religion was preserved: Observe the Manners of Men, and their religious Services, and when you are tired with the sad Prospect of the Ignorance and Barbarity of some, the Superstition and Idolatry of all, tell me once more, did the World want an Instructor or no? If it did, we have little Reason to complain that it had one, still less to stumble at the Dignity of the Person who undertook the desperate Cause of Nature; or to reject his Authority, because he is greater than we know how to conceive, even the only begotten Son of God.

He came into the World, not merely to restore the Religion of Nature, but to adapt it to the State and Condition of Man, and to supply the Defects, not of Religion, which continued in its first Purity and Perfection, but of Nature, which was fallen from the original Dignity of the Creation. Man was born the Heir of Glory and Immortality,
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but our Saviour found him under the Power of Sin and of Death. If Death came in as the Penalty of Disobedience to the Law of Nature, as we learn from the sure Word of Prophecy that it did, it was an Evil, for which natural Religion could afford no Remedy ; for no Law provides a Remedy against its own Penalties ; which would be to weaken and destroy the Obligations to Obedience, which the Penalty was intended to enforce. And tho' the World every where retained some Notion or other of a future State, and was fond of cherishing the languishing Hopes of Immortality ; yet these Hopes seem rather to be the Remains of that first State, in which Nature had the full Prospect of Life before her, and which subsisted when the Blessing itself was forfeited, than any just Assurance of another Life after Death, to be purchased by Vertue and Obedience. To repair this Breach, and to settle Religion once more, upon the sure Foundation of the Hopes and Fears of Eternity, our Blessed Lord *brought Life and Immortality to light again* by his Gospel ; and published to the World the new Doctrine of a Resurrection from the Grave, of the Truth of which Doctrine, we had the first Instance, and the fullest Confirmation, in his own victo-
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rious Triumph over the Powers of Death and of Darkneſs. Hence it is that we are ſaid to be begotten again thro' Chriſt Jeſus unto a lively Hope, or unto the Hope of Life: Hence alſo we are told, that *God hath now appointed a Day, in which he will judge the World by the Man Chriſt Jeſus.* Hence it is, that theſe two, or rather this one Article relating to a Reſurrection and a Judgment to come, was the main Thing which the Apoſtles had in Commiſſion to publiſh to the World; inſomuch that when a new Apoſtle was to be choſen in the Room of *Judas*, it was required, as a neceſſary Article, that he ſhould be qualified to be a competent Witneſs of the Reſurrection of Chriſt, in which the Authority of this great Article was founded.

But to what Purpoſe was it to reſtore Religion from the Corruptions of Ignorance and Superſtition; to what End was this *better Hope* brought in; ſince our firſt Parents, who wanted not this Hope, nor this Knowledge, yet wretchedly fell from both by Tranſgreſſion, what Security can we, their Sons, ſtill worſe than they, promiſe our ſelves from theſe Advantages? 'Tis we that are weak and degenerate, 'tis we that moſt of all want to be reſtored: This original Corruption made it neceſſary,

cessary, in Order to save the World, not only to restore Religion, but Nature her self. Hence it is that our Admission into the Gospel is attended with a new Birth unto Righteousness; hence is it that we are put under the Conduct and Direction of the Holy Spirit, who is our Fellow-labourer in the Gospel, and in all Times, and in all Places, ready to comfort and support the Faithful: If to strengthen our Confidence in him, we are told that he is in all respects equal to the extensive Charge; that being the Eternal Spirit of God, he can in all Places and in all Times discharge the Office; this Knowledge, which was communicated to make our Faith and Hope consistent, and to set both upon a reasonable Foundation, ought to be no Objection against either. And since these Articles of our Creed, being beyond the Discovery of humane Reason, are placed upon the surer Foundation of the Demonstration of the Spirit, in mighty Signs and Wonders, they ought to be no Stumbling-Block to us; for Reason may teach us to embrace the Remedy, which she could not provide.

'Tis true, the Gospel has taught us Things, which by Nature we could not know; but they are all designed to confirm and strengthen our Hope in God; 'tis true also, that there are some Institutions in the Gospel, which in their
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own Nature are no constituent Parts of Religion, but they are such only as are necessary to enable us to do our Duty, by conveying to us new Supplies of spiritual Strength. These are the Additions which the Gospel has made to natural Religion, forgive it this Injury. Our Blessed Saviour saw that the Hopes of Nature were lost, therefore he brought to light again Life and Immortality : He saw that we were corrupted, not able to resist Evil, and therefore he supplied the Defect by the Assistance of his holy Spirit ; pardon his Care, and do not think the worse of him, or his Religion, for the great Provision he has made in it for your Security.

These Considerations may perhaps suggest to your Thoughts what probable Ground there is to hope for Success in our Endeavours, to spread the Gospel of Christ in the dark Corners of the World; and what is the true Method of proposing it to the uninstructed Part of Mankind: But as I chuse to decline this Subject, and to leave it to the properer Hands on which 'tis placed, I shall shut up all with this Petition: That God would hasten the Completion of the Prophecies relating to the Kingdom of Christ ; that he would give him the Heathen for his Inheritance, and the utmost Parts of the Earth for his Possession, that he may be his Salvation to all People.

F I N I S.

